

Study Techniques

Study techniques vary from person to person. What works well for another person may not work well for you so it is important to learn which techniques help *you* the most. Below is a list of the most popular study techniques used in law school. Not all of these are necessary for law school success. Rather, you should pick and choose what works for you.

Preparing to Study

- ★ **Create a Study Schedule.** The first step to studying for exams in law school is to create a study schedule. Without one, you will likely not be able to accomplish everything you need to before the exam comes. A study schedule should plan out which hours of the day you are going to study, and what you are going to study during those times for the entire finals period. In addition to scheduling what you will study when, you should also schedule in time needed to take care of yourself. Eating, showering, sleeping, exercise, breaks, and down-time should be included in your schedule. Related, give yourself a reasonable cutoff time. For some, this is an hour before bed to read a book that you enjoy, watch your favorite show, or just hang out with a friend. However you choose to spend the time, it is beneficial to give your mind a break.
- ★ **Do not procrastinate!** We hear it over and over to not procrastinate, yet we continue to do it. You may have gotten away with procrastination in other aspects of life, but it is not your friend in law school. Not only does this make time management harder and force cramming, it will also increase your stress levels. By studying early on, from the first day of the semester, you can focus on taking your time and going through everything at a pace that is reasonable and manageable for you. Studying earlier in the semester also allows for you to feel more confident going into the exam, knowing that you did the best that you could with the time available.
- ★ **Get everything else out of the way.** Do you have an upcoming paper to do? Or maybe other responsibilities that require your attention? Get them done early on, that way when it comes time to study you can dedicate all of your time and energy to studying and not have to stress over anything else that you may have to do. This is an extremely important tip if you are enrolled in a writing class in addition to classes with final exams. Although writing classes are extremely important not only for law school, but for your career as an attorney, working on a writing assignment is the last thing you will want to do when finals are quickly approaching.

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- ★ **Outlines.** Creating an outline that includes everything you have learned in an organized fashion is a very popular study technique for many reasons. First, the process of creating an outline is in and of itself a way of studying. To correctly outline, you should not be putting anything on the document unless you truly understand it. This means you are actively studying while outlining. Second, most study techniques and study documents

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stem from an outline, so having a good outline is often the first step in final exam success. For more information on how to make an outline, see *The Traditional Outline*.

- ★ **Attack Outlines.** Attack outlines are shorter versions of your main outline. These can be very helpful when it comes to exams because the end result is a more condensed version of the information that cuts out anything not important. For more information on how to make an attack outline, see *The Attack Outline*.
- ★ **Flowcharts and Mind Maps.** For those who are more visual learners, creating flowcharts and mind maps that connect the material together can be a useful study method. These can be used as an alternative to a traditional outline, or a supplement to one. For more information on how to make these, see *Alternatives to a Traditional Outline*.
- ★ **Flashcards.** Flashcards are a helpful tool for memorizing information. When making flashcards, feel free to convert as much or as little of your outline to flashcards as you would find helpful. For students who use flashcards as one of their primary study techniques, they often convert every word of their outline to flashcards. Other students find it helpful to only put definitions or cases on flashcards. Regardless of how much you convert, you should study your flashcards in a certain order. You should start by memorizing your flashcards in groups. For example, memorizing all of your battery flashcards, then all of your assault flashcards. This helps you link the concepts together and recognize which rules are related to which cases. Once you have a good grasp of each topic, then you should mix up entire subject areas so immediately after studying a flashcard on the definition of intent you are studying a flashcard on *United States v. Carroll Towing, Inc.*
- ★ **Multiple Choice Questions.** Even if the exam you are studying for isn't a multiple choice exam, doing multiple choice questions is a good way to check your progress and understanding of the law. You can often find multiple choice questions online, or you can reach out to anyone on the academic success team for some.
- ★ **Acronyms and Mnemonics.** Some law students use acronyms to help memorize the information. This can be in the form of either a series of letters or a series of words that you associate with a legal topic to help you remember that topic.
- ★ **Whiteboarding.** A technique some students prefer is to use a whiteboard. For some, this means creating an outline and writing the outline out on the whiteboard in order to better visualize it and commit it to memory. For others, this can be creating a mind map, flowchart, or some kind of diagram that helps make necessary connections between topics and makes the material make more sense and then drawing that out on the whiteboard. Whiteboards can be extremely helpful because you get the benefit of writing out the material but you don't have to sit with paper and a pen. At the end of each day and on the weekends most rooms in the law school are open and free for you to use the whiteboards inside.

- ★ **Say It Out Loud.** Speaking your notes out loud or explaining them to someone else can be extremely beneficial for memorization. You can do this alone in your room in front of a mirror, to a friend or family member, or even in the shower. To do this correctly, look at a heading on your outline, such as negligence. Put your outline down and see if you can *explain* negligence to another person, or yourself. The key word is *explain*. If you just rattle off the exact words in your outline, such as “negligence: duty, breach, causation, damages,” although you will be testing your memorization skills, you will not be testing your understanding and application skills. Instead, say “Negligence has four elements, duty, breach, causation, and damages. All four have to be satisfied for a defendant to be held liable for negligence.”
- ★ **Practice Applying The Material.** There are two key components to law school exams: memorizing and understanding. Most law students do not perform as well as they expect to because they are so focused on memorizing the material that they forget to work on understanding what it is they are memorizing. It is one thing to know what the definition of intent is; it is a completely different thing to be able to apply that definition of intent to any given set of facts. The best way to bridge the gap between memorization and understanding is to complete practice hypotheticals. You can find many online, oftentimes professors give them out, and you can reach out to anyone on the academic success team for some.

Other Tips

- ★ **Study Groups.** Sometimes working with a group of your peers can help you study the material. Talking to people who learned the same material and sat through the same classes as you can be beneficial because there could be something you missed in class or something you did not understand that your classmate did. In addition, as the technique of “saying it out loud” above describes, by explaining concepts out loud you are actively memorizing and understanding the material. Be cautious with study groups, however, There are times when study groups can become large or distracting. If you find that you are not studying productively with a group, it may be better to study with just one or two other people or on your own.
- ★ **Self-Discipline.** In law school you will make great friends and want to do fun activities with them outside of law school. It is definitely okay, even encouraged, to take time to hang out with your friends. That being said, do not lose sight of the focus of law school, which is *law school*. Be careful to find the balance between hanging out with friends and productively studying with friends, especially during the last couple months of the semester.
- ★ **Don’t Understand Something? Ask!** There are many confusing concepts you will encounter throughout your time in law school, and often these are the concepts professors love to test on. If you have a question about it, it is highly likely that someone else does as well. Don’t be afraid to talk to professors and ask them questions, whether it's in class,

after class, or in office hours. Professors want you to understand, they want to read good exam answers, and they want to know that they are effectively conveying the material. Do not be afraid to ask a professor any questions that you may have. If you are nervous about whether your question is a good one... it is! The cliché is true: there is no such thing as a bad question. Even if you feel embarrassed for asking a certain question, think about it this way: it is more embarrassing to go into an exam knowing you do not know a concept because you did not try to understand it than any question you could possibly ask.

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